



Civil Rights Commission

2008 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest
"Breaking Barriers"

Katie Carroll – Second Place

All that he wanted was peace, justice, opportunity. Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted to break down the barriers. Martin Luther King, Jr. helped break down barriers in 1968 with the Civil Rights Movement, and though he is not around anymore, his spirit stays with us. Because of him, we have broken down even more barriers and we will continue to pursue his dream.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a major influence on America during the Civil Rights Movement. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American, was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat. That event started the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Martin Luther King, Jr. protested with them, was arrested, and his house was bombed. He still didn't give up. Martin Luther King, Jr. then became famous for his philosophy of nonviolent resistance.

In August of 1963, the March on Washington took place to fight for African American job freedom. This is when Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech. He protested that African Americans did not have freedom. Even though the Declaration of Independence states that all men should have "unalienable Rights," of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," African Americans did not have that. What Martin Luther King, Jr. protested was true. African Americans did not have the same rights. They were not treated with respect. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "All progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem." This shows that even though Martin Luther King, Jr. had gotten one step further in giving African Americans their job freedom, there were still other issues that would follow.

In 1964, the Civil Rights act outlawed segregation in public schools and public places. In the south, whites were still against the rights of African Americans, especially voting rights. Poll taxes and literacy tests made it easy for the whites to restrict African Americans from voting. With literacy tests, whites whom were not educated were still able to register to vote, while African Americans with college degrees could not register. Then there were poll taxes which required African Americans to pay if they wanted to vote. This made it so that very little of the African American population could vote. About two years later, in 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. led several marches for African American voting rights. Eventually, Martin Luther King, Jr. broke the barrier and earned the voting rights for African Americans.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of thirty-five. He donated most of the prize money to the Civil Rights Movement. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was standing out on his balcony, when he was shot and killed.

Even though Martin Luther King, Jr. is dead, his spirit stays strong. He did not get to see his full dream fulfilled, and so we must do all we can to support him. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an inspiration to America and all across the globe. It is too bad that Martin Luther King, Jr. did not live to see the day where a piece of his dream was lived, a day where another barrier was broken. On November 4, 2008, we, America, broke a huge barrier. We elected the first African American president of the United States.

Barack Obama won the election against John McCain, a presidential race that we will never forget. We will never forget that election where no matter who won, a barrier would be broken. Either we would have our first African American president, or we would have a woman in the office. That woman being Sarah Palin, John McCain's vice president nominee, she would have been the first woman to take office. Some say that Barack Obama inspired people the way that Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired America. Whether that statement is true or not, we do know that Martin Luther King, Jr. would be proud of Barack Obama and his accomplishment. He would be proud for breaking a barrier and living out his dream. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Nonviolent resistance...is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. Consequently the believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future." With that said, we should all work together to fulfill Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream and break down all of the barriers that still exist and make the world a better place for everyone.

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